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مقاله حاضر با تعمق بر ایده «بدیل» به دو سـویه مختلف بدیل‌ها در فضاهای تجاری می‌نگرد: یعنی از یک سـو کارهای بدیل طراحی که شـیوه‌های مرسوم طراحی فضاهای تجاری را زیر سـوال می‌برند و از آنها فاصله می‌گیرند، و از سویی دیگر تولیدات اجتماعی فضایی که خودِ خرید کردن در شکل متعارف، و هم‌چنین سبک زندگی هم‌بسته با آن را به چالش می‌کشند. این مقایسه از طریق موشکافیِ یک نمونه از هر کدام از این گونه‌ها در دو بستر بسیار متفاوت صورت می‌پذیرد، و نشان داده می‌شود که با وجود تفاوت‌های عمیق دو بستر، پیوندهای قوی‌ای بین فضاهای بدیل مصرف‌گری از یک سو، و فضاهای مصرف‌گری بدیل از سوی دیگر میان این دو بستر وجود دارد.

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Figure 4: Parvaaneh shopping centre rear façade with stall vendors spreading out of the building (https://b.elicdn.com/cdn-cgi/image/fit=contain,width=1200,quality=100/Blog/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87.jpg)

Figure 5: Bullring Birmingham: the stark contrast between Selfridges and the adjoining part

Figure 2: Alaadinn Market
This Photo by Mahammad Ali Marizad is licensed under CC BY

Figure 3: Parvaaneh shopping centre and car park: front façade (https://media.shahr.ir/d/2020/06/15/3/3954.jpg)

Figure 1c: Birmingham Selfridges store, by Future Systems

Figure 1d: Camden Market
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Figure 1b: Parvaaneh marketplace

alternative shopping any more efficient in this respect? So engulfed are many present-day societies by neoliberalism that it is hard to think of positive answers to above questions. Opportunities, however, can be sought and seized, both by designers, and more importantly those present in today's public realms of consumption.

Epilogue

By the time completion of the present paper, the battle over the survival of Parvaaneh Friday Market was overcome with the closure of the market in the long-murmured name of safety concerns, helped by the emerging COVID-19 concerns. The authorities changed the venue to a relatively quiet, less urbanised open space where it is much harder to access, particularly by public transport. It is not inconceivable that it was actually not so much health and safety concerns than the fear of a growingly out of control public realm: one in which approved codes of behaviour and dress, let alone social interactions cannot be monitored well enough.

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Figure 1a: Charsoo Shopping Centre, main view, by Majid Mohammadi

On the other side of the spectrum, there is no shortage of alternative marketplaces in the UK. Many of them may well have been acquired and managed by conventional business operations, posing no challenge against regular business in these respects. One might also argue, along Heat and Potter, that even alternative goods sales and non-compliant visitors are in turn no challenge to the system, indeed necessary parts of business plans suited to these shopping environments. They leave room, however, for fringe communities and tradespeople to produce their alternative shopping spaces. Camden Market in London is a case in the point. Initiated in 1974 (https://www.camdenmarket.com) with only 16 stalls as a Saturday market, it is now a seven-days-a-week market in a much larger scale than Tehran's Parvaaneh, with a lot of additional amenities such as event venues. There are, however, interesting parallels between the two. Similar to Parvaaneh, Camden Market has no well-defined geographic boundaries, and is more of a zone. There is a wide variety of items to sell – generally not items one would find in trendy upmarket shops – as well as people. Of note is the uncanny qualities of many items and visitors, rendering the place as a hotbed for alternative shopping experience. The built environment is fragmented and inconsistent including many old and new buildings of different ages, scales and qualities, with no legible access network or hierarchies, leaving visitors with much to discover for themselves. Here again, and despite the role this diversity of built environment qualities plays in the richness and playfulness of the built environment, it can be claimed that Camden Market owes a lot of its appeal to its visitors' community and uncanny shopping, eating and socializing environment. This brings the market very close to its Tehran counterpart in the car park; just as Birmingham's Selfridges finds parallels in Charsoo phone market. With the former pair, the difference lies in how the establishment and big business manages to appropriate, manage, and eventually exploit socially produced spaces whilst allowing them to keep their counter-cultural brand, or on the other hand how visitors' communities manage to resist and keep those public realms outside the establishment's control. With the latter pair, the difference is in the status quo, and how the alternative finds its distinguished meaning in each context. In a context in which uninspiring, crammed hyper-functional, or kitsch retail buildings are still the mainstream, the alternative is a work of high art bringing airiness and fun back to this public realm. In another context where such qualities are already normal, the alternative moves away from the politeness of commercial modernist buildings towards the alien, the extraordinary, and the non-standard. In both latter cases, however, challenges are not posed against mainstream shopping; just creating better, more attractive, more efficient spaces, and, yes, it also entails the creation of attractive public domains, where unplanned events can take place, albeit under tight controls.

Final Reflections

Can a public activity like shopping, with such strong ties with economic powers, ever produce a form of resistance or emancipation? Can it defy powers which appropriate it, and turn shopping into the backbone, if not, with reference to Koolhaas, the only remaining form of public life? Are socially produced spaces of

a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds, forming a diversity hardly found it the above-mentioned Charsoo. They defied upmarket, big-business shopping models offered by the likes of Charsoo, not only for its rundown spatial qualities, but also for what a customer would buy: useless, old household items, second-hand worn-out jewellery, fake fashion, leftovers and remainders of old stocks, and craft and fashion not of big brands but made by independent, small-scale operations; complete with cheap fast-food of dubious hygiene standards. Market goers also demonstrated a negligence of officially favoured dress codes in favour of present themselves with alternative looks: a very sensitive issue in the country's strict dress code prescriptions. This, and not the design, was, therefore, where the market embraced the alternative. Yes, it was still within the frameworks of a consumerist society in that the exchange of primarily non-essential, fancy objects is the market's raison d'être. But it was also a space of non-compliance with big business market forces and the establishment's cultural codes. The industrial-looking, dilapidated building did not appear to be a business burden. On the contrary, it brought the market closer to its counterparts elsewhere in the world: the rough industrial-cum-commercial buildings of London's Brick Lane area for instance.

The International Counterparts to a Supposedly Isolated Society

The above two models for contemporary public spaces of consumerism are by no means unparalleled internationally. The difference is not so much in their existence than in the background against which the alternative is posed. For architects designing shopping spaces, it is more the question of what design clichés and mainstream models are there to challenge; what to emancipate architecture from. For alternative shoppers it is how to be the present-day Benjaminian urban flâneur, defying the establishment-sanctioned norms, not just through wandering around, not necessarily in a bourgeois fashion, but also to identify themselves through alternative modes of consumption.

A telling example of the former is the Selfridges store in Birmingham. Part of the larger shopping complex Bullring, the contrast between the store building and the rest of the complex can hardly be starker (figure 5). Whilst there are parallels between design features of Bullring and Charsoo in their spaciousness, freedom of movement and playful geometries among other things, such features are to some degree common in UK more recent shopping environments, notably London's Westfield Stratford and White City shopping centres. The alternative, therefore, cannot be identified with such features. Future Systems work, thus, seeks the alternative through its own design heritage: the alien, the futuristic, the spaceship, the smoothly curving skin, the uncanny fenestration and the like. The design has certainly and enormously helped Selfridges to stand out, not just in Bullring but also as a significant millennial architectural work. Step inside for shopping, however, and you will find little to differentiate shopping models of the rest of the complex, or indeed any shopping centre. The alternative design stops short of offering any alternative shopping model – and probably never meant to.

concept of the alternative changes when one moves from one type and/or country to the other, and how their successes and failures compare.

Tehran: An Isolated Capital or Another Capital Left with the "Last Remaining Form of Public Activity"?

The author has argued elsewhere (2019) that however isolated and different we might think of Tehran in the global scene, the mechanisms of producing designed built environments has a lot in common with their counterparts in cities deemed more aligned with global capitalism. This includes a surge in recent decades in large-scale retail developments. In some cases, they are built in less congested suburban areas of cities, but Charsoo Bazaar is located in the rather derelict albeit still economically buzzing central Tehran. It is in sharp contrast with its adjacent Aladdin: an overdeveloped, overpopulated crammed marketplace for mobile phones including stall vendors selling second-hand phones generally suspicious for being stolen items (figure 2 a–b). Aladdin is perhaps typical of derelict commercial and retail buildings in the downtown. Charsoo is certainly an alternative building in this respect: a spacious, upmarket shopping building with a generously recessed entrance area and a large, spectacular void containing a whirlwind of escalators in the middle, with equally generous corridors and large retail units in lower floors. The design (by Majid Mohammadi) is clearly distanced from both cheap and cheerful quasi-functionalist architecture of old downtown commercial buildings, and banal, flashy styles of more recent counterparts. There is a volumetric play on the exteriors to mark the former distancing, and a complex, albeit understated perforated metal cladding to mark the latter. More importantly, the architect has defied the imposing land-value logics by dedicating upper floors to a cinema and unplanned event spaces. The contrast between the two neighbouring retail buildings is well reflected in their visitors, with visitors of the former being customers on tighter budgets looking for better deals, and the latter more affluent customers after a better shopping experience and browsing brand stores. The building, thus, can confidently be considered as an alternative to mainstream shopping buildings of Tehran in more respects than one, and certainly adds something to the quality of retail building stock of the city. For all its merits in promoting social interactions and improving shopping experience, though, it is more of an attempt in creating an upmarket shopping environment whose amenities are meant to help boost retail performance through well-equipped facilities. More often than not, one can witness that the large void is no host to any meaningful social activities, and event spaces left idle.

Move a few hundred meters eastwards in Jomhouri Street, where Charsoo is located, and you will find a derelict multi-story car park which belongs to the adjacent retail building "Parvaaneh" (figure 3). The car park closed doors to cars in weekends and turned into a Friday market. The market was initially known as a rag market, but actually more than that: crafts, tableware, textiles, jewellery etc. were laid on stalls. Despite the building being at the hearth of this Friday market, the markets "leaked" beyond the car park boundaries onto surrounding areas (figure 4), partly due to successes of the market, and partly because the car park area market was managed, with levies charged for hiring stall places. The visitors looked like they come from

The illusion of a critical architecture becomes compatible with a specialization in the production and reproduction of symbolic and social capital. This critique is explored through the fields of practice, criticism, publishing and education. Architectural discourse produces a controlled critique that is funded, framed and subtly controlled by advertising. The delivery of "critique" to architects is the means to deliver architects to advertisers, and architectural academy often conflates such controlled critique with research. (ibid.)

He discusses how the sense of place requires "intensities" on top, or in lieu of physical form: a word he associates with qualities such as temperature, color, activity, encounter, character or place. He explores philosophical roots of extensions versus intensities of space, and sees the intensity as "most strongly linked to the sense and affect of place" (26). He also cites (31) the work of Bourdieu, for whom "fields of cultural production, such as architecture, are structured in a manner which sustains the authority of those who already possess it: those with the 'cultural capital' and the 'feel for the game' embodied in the habitus". Attempts by the avant-garde to overturn the alliance between architecture and authority "play a key role in reinvigorating the existing 'field' of privileged practices. Conservatism, Bourdieu argues, re-emerges disguised as the urge for the ever-new (ibid.). For Bourdieu, Dovey observes (32), the term "habitus" "frames the ways in which everyday world of social practice is constructed and learned in early childhood". The habitus "is a way of knowing the world, a set of divisions of space and time, of people and things, which structure", whilst social practice is seen as a game "within which the habitus is learnt, not as a set of fixed categories but as a set of dispositions to act".

The designed space, thus, is prone to act within power frameworks of a given establishment, and the avant-garde, and indeed any other attempts in alternative design, for breaking with the oppressive, suffocating history – distant or recent – is susceptible to be not genuinely emancipatory, not truly transforming anything in the society, but merely escaping the boredom of the old, generating the next fashionable trend, the next step for economic, if not political powers to stay in the vogue. The heavily encoded design languages employed in alternatively designed spaces are likely to remain illegible or unimportant for the daily user. The socially produced spaces on the other hand, are prone to be forever messy, ill-organized, prosaic, and a potential hotbed for disobedient or anti-social practices – depending on how one looks at it. However, the latter is the site for resistance, for truly alternative practices, sites of social vivacity and buzz.

What follows is a closer look on some spaces of those Koolhaasian "last remaining form of public activity", namely shopping spaces: a designed and a socially-produced marketplace in Tehran, and two rather curious counterparts in the UK. It investigated how designed shopping spaces strive to create alternatives to the mainstream built environment design, and how their socially produced counterparts create alternatives to mainstream shopping and social interactions. There is no claim here that alternative designed spaces make no difference to shopping experience. Nor is there a belief that alternative socially produced spaces are not prone to be played at the hands of big business. There is, however, an attempt to show how the

Derrida's concerns about "how could an architect be interested in deconstruction? After all, deconstruction is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, anti-structure, the opposite of all that architecture stands for" (171–2). When it comes to fifth and sixth concepts, namely "crossprogramming" and "events", Tschumi turns his attention towards what is not exactly controlled by the architect. Of the former he writes:

> Architecture has always been as much about the event that takes place in a space as about the space itself. … If shock can no longer be produced by the succession and juxtaposition of façades and lobbies, maybe it can be produced by the juxtaposition of events that take place behind these façades in these spaces. … If architecture is both concept and experience, space and use, structure and superficial image -- non-hierarchically -- then architecture should cease to separate these categories and instead merge them into unprecedented combinations of programs and spaces. (174)

He dates back the roots of his terms "event" and "movement" to the Situationist discourse:

> Les événements, as they were called, were not only "events" in action, but also in thought. Erecting a barricade (function) in a Paris street (form) is not quite equivalent to being a flâneur (function) in that same street (form). Dining (function) in the Rotunda (form) is not quite equivalent to reading or swimming in it. Here all hierarchical relationships between form and function cease to exist.

Bridging between designed vs. socially produced space binary on one hand and phenomenologically-oriented views on the other, Kim Dovey (2010) discusses what distinguishes space and place in "that place has an intensity that connects sociality to spatiality in everyday life" (3). Focusing on structuralist and post-structuralist points of view, he rounds up how some key figures in this tradition view the meanings of place as forms of discourse:

> For Barthes (1973), place is a form of mythology, for Foucault (1979) a form of constructed subjectivity, for Derrida (1974) a text. Such approaches seek to problematize the ways that conceptions of identity become enmeshed with place, naturalized and depoliticized. (4)

He criticizes discourse analysis and deconstructive methods for being reliant on "a reduction of place to text that bypasses the question of ontology and strips the sense of place of some of its most fertile complications, most importantly its connection to onto logical security" (ibid.). Comparing conceptual frameworks of Gilles Deleuze and Pierre Bourdieu for place he cites their consistencies:

> Both begin from the view that spatiality and sociality are integrated, neither relies on a division between subject and object. Both assemblage and habitus are immanent to everyday life rather than transcendent abstractions. (7)

He sees form/function and representation/action binaries as "clues to understand the ways a supposedly "critical" architecture is neutralized – contained as form insulated from life (80):

obvious example. In this way both practices of designing architecture autre and alternative shopping are exposed to being neutralized and exploited by market forces.

Consumption, Conformity and Resistance

There are views from, among others Mary Douglas, Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu, which consider consumption as a means of communication (Moeini et.al 2018:3). Others such as John Fiske and de Certeau see consumption as a mode of production. The consumption of commodities and places are, therefore, seen as having social meanings (ibid.: 4), with the consumer behavior itself as a sort of resistance and production (Kazemi 2013: 13). As the author has discussed elsewhere (Moeini et.al. 2018: 6):

> De Certeau believes that this resistance is a strategic game and tactics in the city. He believes that "strategy" is the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment". A strategy assumes a place that can be defined as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles", targets, or "objects" of research). Political, economic and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model. A "tactic", on the other hand, is a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or instrumental localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions and secure independence with respect to circumstances. …
>
> Another point to notice [in the work of Fiske] is that like many other goods, space and architecture are produced by the capitalist system and power institutions, and consumed by people as an ordinary object. It is through this very consumption that resistance occurs and large-scale semiological codes are made. Space finds its meaning through architectural form and organization. This struggle over meaning also occurs through consuming urban spaces.

Designed Spaces, Socially Produced Spaces

An interesting voice acknowledging how social production of space matters, albeit without reference to the likes of Lefebvre, is Bernard Tschumi's earlier work in his "Six Concepts" from Architecture and Disjunction (2000). The first four points sticks to designer's position, namely "technologies of defamiliarization", "mediated 'metropolitan' shock", "de-structuring" (questioning long-established clichés about building structure), and "superimposition". Already in the latter, though, he refers to his discussions with Derrida and

Introduction

Rem Koolhaas famously proclaimed shopping as “the last remaining form of public activity”. Whether or not one agrees with the solitary status Koolhaas asserts for shopping as public activity, there is little doubt how important an aspect it is in present-day social life. This renders present-day shopping spaces as prefect cases for studying public realm and its (r)evolution. Add to this the well-discussed aspects of designed vs. lived spaces, and there appears to be a lot more to explore on associations between this “form of public activity” and their built environments. The present paper intends to do just that through a comparison between examples of alternatively designed shopping spaces on one hand, and alternative shopping spaces on the other. This is not necessarily from a sympathetic point of view with present-day shopping culture and its associations with unsustainable and/ or big business practices (Moeini 2010), but certainly in the acknowledgement of the seminal role of shopping and how it can help present-day communities and designers alike to identify themselves through their mode of involvement with shopping.

Background I: History of a Personal Journey

As it happens, the author has had first-hand experience of all four cases studied here, written a criticism on one, and supervised a research on another (figures 1a–d). What was interesting throughout these experiences, was that how what is recognized as experimental design barely offers a genuinely alternative experience when it comes to day-to-day use, whilst prosaic spaces on the other hand can turn into hotbeds of alternative shopping.

Equally formative was the research on unofficial cultural spaces of Tehran (2018), namely, alternative cafes, bookshops and art galleries. With references to, among others, Foucault, De Certeau, Lefebvre and John Fiske, it was shown there how the socially and culturally marginalized reclaim their share of public space through appropriation of prosaic urban spaces, thereby resisting the establishment values.

Background II: The Alternative

The author has argued elsewhere that emancipation, otherness and ethicality have always had strong associations in modern times. Otherness is not just a way to satisfy present-day crave for the new for the sake of it; there is often an emancipatory element for breaking with the mainstream, the old, the traditional, whether we call it the avant-garde attitude or not. From British utopians such as Ebenezer Howard, to Le Corbusier, Rayner Banham (Architecture Autre) and Peter Eisenman, to name just a few, one can find many instances of such associations. This has its parallels in other arts, as well as in cultural trends. In their book The Rebel Sell (2005), Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter observe how any counter-cultural trend eventually ends up being absorbed into capitalist orders, another merchandise to sell and make profit from. The same could be said to be the case with alternative art and architecture, with Modernist architecture being an

Prologue

Along central stretch of Tehran's rather rundown Jomhouri (Republic) Ave. sit two major marketplaces of very different types. Charsoo, an upmarket electronics and mobile phone goods shopping centre designed by starchitect Majid Mohammadi, is a critically acclaimed design praised for its generous atrium, the provision of non-programmed spaces for social interactions, planned performance spaces, and the bold clashing angles of its volumetric design and decorative, perforated cladding with everchanging patterns. References are recognisable to Avant-garde exponents of the 1960s who encouraged breaking with the mainstream whilst welcoming the pleasures of post-industrial, consumerist society such as Archigram and Cedric Price. The clashing angles of Deconstruction-period Eisenman and post-critical, Michael Speaks-inspired decorative styles of FOA/ Mousavi are also not far away. Conflicting as they may seem, the work offers an alternative to the crammed neighbouring shopping centres with maximised leasable areas, ordinary designs, and no room whatsoever for social interactions and non-retail activities: in other words, an alternative to the average shopping centre in downtown Tehran. Move eastwards along the street to Parvaaneh multi-storey car park, and there was, until the start of the pandemic, an altogether different version of alternative shopping experience on offer. Turning from a carpark into a Friday-market every (Iranian) weekend, the bland, dilapidated building was transformed into a vivid environment for selling obsolete household items, cheap fashion, crafts, remainder stocks etc. The place not only attracted foreign tourists, but is also a melting pot for crowds of people not naturally coming to this area, and not conforming to acceptable state-endorsed norms. Architectural design played no role in this place's buzz and seduction, and one needs to refer not to avant-garde art, Derrida or Speaks but to Lefebvre and De Certeau to get a better grasp of it. This schism, however, is by no means unique, with parallels existing around the world. For example, a similar difference can be found between the alternative experience on offer in Future Systems' Birmingham Selfridges and Camden Market in London, where the former is one of the few crystallisations of the architects' Avant-garde ideas about space, and the latter, however absorbed into big business, a hotbed for alternative shopping and communities. The present paper attempts to correlate Charsoo and Parvaaneh with avant-gardism in art, Deconstruction and post-critical theories on one hand, and Lefebvre and De Certeau's concepts of production of space and resistance through the everyday practices on the other. It then moves on to investigate the way in which the construction of the alternative differs, both on the authorial side of architects and the bottom-up space-making practices of alternative cultures when we move from one context to the other.

> Most architects consider space to be malleable according to the order of the architect. Rarely does an architect understand space in terms familiar to Lefebvre, as complex, grounded in everyday life and made and transformed by experience. (Hill 2006: 53)

Alternative Spaces of Consumption, Spaces of Alternative Consumption: A Story of Two Neighbouring Tehran Marketplaces and their Overseas Counterparts

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Abstract

Reflecting on the ideas of 'the alternative', the present paper looks at the two sides of the alternative in retail spaces, namely alternative design practices which question and distance themselves from the ways in which mainstream commercial spaces are designed on one hand, and social productions of space which challenge mainstream shopping practices and their associated lifestyles on the other. This comparison is done through scrutinizing one example of each type in two very different contexts, namely, the UK and Iran, and shows that despite deep contextual differences, there are strong associations between alternative spaces of consumption on one hand, and spaces of alternative consumption on the other, among the two contexts.

Keywords: Alternative culture, Alternative design, Consumerism, Production of Space, Spaces of resistance.

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